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SUBJECT: ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED'S MEETING WITH RUSSIAN
DFM KARASIN, APRIL 23

Classified By: Ambassador William J. Burns. Reason: 1.4 (b, d)

SUMMARY

11. (C) EUR A/S Daniel Fried and Russian DFM Grigoriy Karasin focused on Georgia and Ukraine during an April 23 discussion in Moscow lasting over an hour. Fried noted recent progress from the Georgian side (the release of an Abkhaz official arrested by the Georgians, toned-down rhetoric) and called for reciprocal steps both from the Abkhaz (release of arrested Georgian students, willingness or dialog without preconditions) and Russians (end to border closures, transport and import bans). Fried said it is time to work towards a visit to New York by Abkhaz "FM" Shamba. Karasin favored gradual Russian normalization with Georgia, but focused on the "alternative" governments the Georgians have set up in Abkhazia and South Ossetia as obstacles to progress, and stressed repeatedly that the de facto Sukhumi and Tskhinvali authorities are "internationally recognized" as parties to the conflicts and participants in negotiations to resolve them.

12. (C) On Ukraine, both Fried and Karasin reiterated the U.S. and Russian positions of refusal to interfere. Both saw the current crisis as an internal political issue that the Ukrainians must resolve by themselves. Karasin said that neither Yushchenko, nor Yanukovich, nor Moroz were interested in violence, but slammed Tymoshenko as having a "relative" interest in seeing the situation spiral out of control. End Summary.

ABKHAZIA

13. (C) Fried led off with the good news of the Georgian release of "Abkhaz" Gali official Chakaberia. He said that after his last conversation with Karasin, he had asked DAS Matt Bryza to work with the Georgian authorities towards the release, and the result had just come through. He hoped the Abkhaz would respond by releasing the three Georgian protestors they have been holding. Karasin said he would telephone Abkhaz de facto leader Bagapsh with the news, and asked about the second Gali official who was abducted and is allegedly being held by the Georgians -- that would be the first question Bagapsh would ask him.

14. (C) Fried raised the ongoing discussion about prospects for a visit by Abkhaz "FM" Shamba to New York. Now that we have UNSCR 1752, it would be useful to develop a way forward on Abkhazia in which Shamba's participation in an informal "Geneva-style" meeting in New York could play a part. Other parts of the way forward could include parallel progress on CBMs approved by the Friends in Geneva, such as improvements in the situation of Georgians in Gali, Abkhaz-Georgian business contacts, direct dialog between the Georgian President Saakashvili and de facto Abkhaz leader Bagapsh, and

return of internally displaced persons. The point was that Shamba's visit to New York should itself be a CBM, not for "polemical purposes."

15. (C) Karasin asked whether the "Geneva-style" meeting meant an "aria-style" meeting, and Fried clarified that it did not.

Karasin said that Shamba wanted to explain Abkhaz positions to UNSC members. Fried reiterated that the visit should not be for polemical purposes, but should contribute to progress.

Karasin continued that Shamba's inability to meet with UNSC members in New York is eroding Abkhaz confidence in the UN. Shamba might himself refuse to visit the UN. But such a visit is important to us all, Karasin maintained: the Abkhaz are an "internationally recognized party to the conflict," and has the right to express its point of view at the UN as a sign of the attention of the international community to the Abkhaz point of view. "The Abkhaz leaders are normal people."

16. (C) Fried responded that we are asking the Abkhaz to show they are serious by reciprocating Georgian steps with their own steps such as releasing their hostages or agreeing to a Bagapsh-Saakashvili meeting. The U.S. does not have a hard and fast list of conditions or demands. It would, however, be good if the Abkhaz can help develop positive momentum towards a settlement. Otherwise, the Shamba visit would just be polemical, just the latest in many attempts by both sides to gain "foolish advantage." "If it's important to you," Fried said, "let's work towards it together. "Message received," Karasin replied.

17. (C) Karasin asked for the U.S. reaction to UNSCR 1752, which renewed the mandate for UNOMIG. Fried said the U.S. views it positively, especially the confirmation of CBMs elaborated by the Friends in February. They are the basis

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for moving ahead with a positive dynamic. He said the Georgians are responding. For example, there was no propaganda campaign after the March 11 attack in Kodori. Karasin said the Russian view of 1752 is equally positive. From a Russian point of view, 1752 called for Georgian restraint in Kodori and reaffirmed 1716. Karasin praised the flexibility of the negotiators that led to a substantive resolution, not a technical rollover.

18. (C) Karasin warned that Kodori is still tense, with potential for new clashes. The Russian PKF is "decisive" but the Russian military leadership fears new provocations from Georgia and will take steps to counter them. The General Staff has shared evidence with Karasin that the Georgians are increasing the quality and quantity of their troops in Kodori. Karasin had promised to speak to the U.S. about that. He warned, "We should be precise: we won't let anyone use force." He understood that the U.S., too, opposes the use of force. Both Russia and the U.S. need to maintain that position, he said.

19. (C) Karasin raised Georgia's refusal to sign an agreement on the non-use of force. Fried pointed out that the draft documents on the non-use of force are part of a package with documents on IDP returns, and are recognized by 1752 as part of the same package. Karasin said that the Georgians are refusing to register their IDPs. Thus if we bind the two documents together too literally we will wait a long time for both. Fried replied that the Georgians have made repeated unilateral statements denying the intention to use force. They object to any agreement that confers greater legitimacy on the Sukhumi authorities, or an analogous agreement with Tskhinvali. Russia and the U.S. need to work together to

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fulfill 1752 by defining IDP return in such a way that both it and an agreement on the non-use of force become achievable goals. Russia has a list of things it wants accomplished, such as the Shamba visit and an agreement on the non-use of force. These are reasonable. Georgia has a list as well,

including IDP return. This, too, is reasonable. We need to put these on a joint list of things to be accomplished.

SOUTH OSSETIA

¶10. (C) Karasin mentioned that a Russian interagency delegation had left that day for Tbilisi. It was headed by DPM Bukayev, and would carry out a needs assessment for South Ossetia, inviting Georgian government officials along. (Note: Bukayev outraged Georgia last year by attending a "joint" meeting of the North Ossetian government and Tskhinvali authorities and calling for unification. End

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note.) Karasin said Russia wants its humanitarian assistance to South Ossetia, while through its own channels, to be fully transparent to Georgia and the OSCE.

¶11. (C) Karasin decried Georgian sponsorship of the Sanakoyev "alternative regime" in Kurta. He said this act cancels out any CBMs. It makes the situation unstable and dangerous. Saakashvili has visited Kurta, and is financing Sanakoyev. Russia has knowledge that Georgia has emplaced 150 special forces personnel under police cover near Kurta. This represents a danger. It will be even more dangerous if the international community starts to deal with the Sanakoyev structure, which is now supported by a new Georgian law. All this makes Kokoity and others nervous. It would be much better to focus on peaceful development, as Russia does, by providing infrastructure, roads, hospitals and schools.

¶12. (C) Fried answered that the U.S. is aware of the new checkpoints and the military outpost outside Kurta. We are looking into it to determine whether this is a legitimate police presence or a violation. He reminded Karasin that Sanakoyev is neither more nor less legitimate than Kokoity. Karasin cut in, saying Fried's assessment was "not polite." There is an important difference between the two, in Russia's view: Kokoity is an "internationally recognized party to the conflict." Tskhinvali is an "internationally accepted member of various structures."

¶13. (C) Fried replied that the U.S. urges Georgia to have contact with Kokoity. But Fried would not advise the Russian Federation to wrap its reputation around Kokoity, whose regime produces counterfeit U.S. hundred dollar bills. EUR DAS Bryza had encouraged the Georgians to focus their new law on the structure of autonomy, not on persons. It was the deprivation of autonomy that had led to the conflict in the first place. Thus Russia should look upon the new law as a useful element.

¶14. (C) Karasin repeated that this is "playing with fire." Any act to strengthen Sanakoyev increases tensions in South

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Ossetia. The Georgians need to negotiate with Kokoity. Karasin hoped the Joint Coordination Commission can move forward. He promised to send Fried immediate news of the results of the Russian delegation's trip to Tbilisi and Tskhinvali.

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RUSSIA-GEORGIA

¶15. (C) Fried said he hopes Russia will resume normal relations with Georgia, ending the border closures, flight bans, bans on the import of agricultural products, wine and mineral water that Russia has imposed. It is an anomaly that even the delegation Russia has sent to work with Georgia cannot fly there directly. Karasin said that Russia has made exceptions to the flight ban, for example at Easter. Fried countered that the whole regime made no sense. Even as

Russia is trying to convince the Georgians to address its concerns, it is engaging in such economic pressure.

¶16. (C) Karasin blamed Georgia for "publicly humiliating" Russian officers in Tbilisi last September. The Russian reaction to that was predictable; "We have our honor." Russia needs signals from the Georgian side "of a positive character" that could lead to gradual improvement in relations, first in the humanitarian sphere, then through direct talks on transport and aviation, and lastly "a gradual return to normal." Karasin said he understands that relations are "abnormal," but called for efforts from both sides.

¶17. (C) Karasin said that if the U.S. wants good Russian-Georgian relations, it should not "push" Georgia into NATO. Russia-Georgia normalization cannot remain unaffected by this. Fried said that the U.S. understands Russia does not like this, but we will be predictable and transparent. Over the next year there will be discussion in NATO over a Membership Action Plan. If Georgia receives a MAP there will be a period of years before further steps. Russia should worry about more immediate concerns.

¶18. (C) Karasin claimed that the U.S. Ambassador had raised with the Georgian government a potential Georgian role in Missile Defense. Fried denied this, saying that this question had been raised in Secretary Gates' meeting earlier that day with DefMin Serdyukov, and U/S Edelman had given a detailed reply. Any discussion of a Georgian role is premature. There had been no such discussion, and no such discussion will be possible in the near term. Edelman had pointed out that we might be interested in collocation, but that implied Azerbaijan rather than Georgia.

¶19. (C) Karasin raised the Georgian suit against Russia in the European Court of Human Rights. He said this could raise tensions. Fried replied that Georgia has stated that the deportees exhausted all national remedies, and had no further recourse to Russian courts. Georgia accuses Russia of refusing to discuss the issue. Karasin said that the suit would bring practical help to no one. He said that 7000 Russian Dukhobors (a religious sect) used to live in a few villages in Georgia. 6000 have left, and those that remain have no representation in their local executives. But Russia is not going to court over this.

¶20. (C) Fried closed the discussion on Georgia by saying that last autumn's anti-Georgian campaign and the sanctions are a terrible anomaly. Russia should take a longer-term view: as Georgia develops economically it will be less prone to adventurism. Karasin replied that Russia is not anti-Georgian; thousands of Georgians play leading roles in Russian society. Fried responded that Russian-Georgian relations should be seen as an organic process, with development replacing confrontation.

UKRAINE -----

¶21. (C) Fried laid out U.S. policy on Ukraine: there is an "orange-blue" government, and it is up to Ukrainian politicians alone to resolve the issues legitimately. The U.S. is not expressing views on the constitutionality of early elections: that is an internal matter, and it is up to the Ukrainians to decide issues of their own constitution. The U.S. has not rushed in to mediate, nor have we urged any others to do so. Our Ambassador in Kyiv maintains contacts with everyone. Karasin noted approvingly that our Ambassador had recently met with Russian Ambassador Chernomyrdin, and Fried reiterated that staying in touch is part of our policy. The U.S. might reconsider its hands-off position if there were a serious outbreak of violence, but now we consider the problem to be a Ukrainian internal political issue.

¶22. (C) Karasin pressed Fried for his personal views of the constitutionality of Yushchenko's decree dissolving the Rada. Fried said he has mixed feelings. If the result were a stable, functioning government it might prove worth it. But the Constitutional Court is weak, and we will never get a clear decision from it. Fried reiterated that the U.S. is not taking sides.

¶23. (C) Karasin said that Russian views are close to those of the U.S. This is the next stage in the creation of a democratic order, the creation of a new political culture with a new pluralism. Russia, like the U.S., is not taking sides and has contact with all parties. Putin recently spoke by telephone with Yushchenko. FM Yatseniuk had just been in Moscow and impressed Karasin as an open-minded, thoughtful minister with no sympathies or antipathies. Yanukovich has been acting "solidly," unlike two or three years ago. Karasin maintained that neither Yushchenko, nor Yanukovich, nor Moroz is interested in violence or allowing the situation to spin out of control. Only Tymoshenko has a "relative" interest in this: it provides a chance, and "she is not one to let chances go by." In the unpredictable world of Ukrainian politics, Yulia Tymoshenko could go into coalition with anyone.

¶24. (C) Whatever the outcome, Karasin said, will be "fine with us." He said there had been some attempt to "raise a cry" about the Black Sea Fleet, but that is not serious. The Ukrainians need a chance to get their house in order and achieve an equilibrium based on a balance of interests. "We are calm," he concluded. Fried said the U.S. is similarly calm. The Ukrainians still do not know what they want to be. Nor can we predict where they will end up. But we do know that if we get into the act the results will be bad. During the Orange revolution we were on the Orange side because the election had clearly been stolen. After the Blues had legitimized themselves through fair elections, we accepted a Yanukovich visit to Washington. "In one respect," Fried concluded, "you were right and we were wrong during the Revolution: you told us the Oranges would be unable to govern effectively. They couldn't."

COMMENT

¶25. (C) Karasin's comments on Georgia highlight three vicious circles:

-- Russian attempts to "legitimize" separatist governments and Georgian attempts to create "alternative" governments feed off one another and lead to an impasse.

-- Full IDP return to Abkhazia is anathema to the Abkhaz, who even today make up a minority of the population of Abkhazia. IDP return is linked in all peace plans to an agreement on the non-use of force; as long as the Russian "peacekeepers" maintains the preponderance of military power in Abkhazia such an agreement implicitly gives Russia the arbitrary power to decide when a violation has taken place and the authorization to intervene. The net result is stagnation in both fields.

-- The Russian search for "signals" from Georgia is a combination of emotion -- Karasin called it "Russian honor" -- and one substantive issue, Georgian NATO membership. There is no practical way Georgia (or the U.S.) can satisfy the Russians on either of these aspects; at best, with U.S. help, Georgia can manage them.

¶26. (U) Assistant Secretary Fried has cleared this message.
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